

Message Text

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ORIGIN EA-14

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TO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PINS, US, AS

SUBJECT: LETTER ON POLITICAL PRISONERS

REF: CANBERRA 2143

1. IN RESPONDING TO YCWM LETTER, YOU MAY WISH TO DRAW ON FOLLOWING POINTS: THE VERY TERM " POLITICAL PRISONERS" IS HIGHLY MISLEADING. IT IS OFTEN USED LOOSELY TO COVER, AMONG OTHERS, HARDENED POLITICAL CADRE, SABOTEURS AND TERRORISTS. MANY OF THESE PEOPLE WERE ENGAGED IN ATTEMPTS TO OVERTHROW THE GVN BY FORCE AND THUS ARE NOT " POLITICAL PRISONERS" IN A MEANINGFUL SENSE OF THE TERM. THESE " COMMUNIST OFFENDERS" AND COMMON CRIMINALS FORM THE VAST BULK OF THE PRISON POPULATION.

2. THE COMMUNISTS AND OTHERS CONTRIBUTING TO THE CURRENT ORGANIZED PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN ON THIS SUBJECT ARE FOND OF USING THE PHRASE "200,000 POLITICAL PRISONERS"; IN THE PAST, THEY HAVE VARIOUSLY RESORTED TO 100,000 OR 300,000. ALL ARE EQUALLY REMOTE FROM REALITY; THE TOTAL CAPACITY
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OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE PRISON SYSTEM IS, IN OUR BEST JUDGMENT, 40-45,000. YOU MAY WISH TO CITE 12/1/72 NY TIMES ARTICLE BY CRAIG WHITNEY (SEE WIRELESS FILE) WHICH POINTS OUT THAT INDEPENDENT AUTHORITIES CONFIRMED GVN POLICE STATEMENT THAT TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS DETAINED IN SOUTH VIETNAMESE JAILS AT THAT TIME WAS ABOUT 35,000. PRESIDENT THIEU, DURING RECENT VISIT HERE, PUT PRISON TOTAL AT 38,000. 3. FRIVOLOUS USE OF FIGURE LIKE 200,000 SYMPTOMATIC OF WHOLE LEVEL OF CRITICISM ON SUBJECT, INCLUDING SENSATIONALIZED PROPAGANDA ON MISTREATMENT. WE CONSIDER THESE UNSUBSTANTIATED CHARGES TO BE EITHER FALSE OR GROSSLY EXAGGERATED.

4. ARTICLE 8 (C) OF JANUARY 27 AGREEMENT ON VIET- NAM SPECIFICALLY PROVIDES THAT THE QUESTION OF CAPTURED AND DETAINED SOUTH VIETNAMESE CIVILIAN PERSONNEL IS MATTER FOR TWO SOUTH VIETNAMESE PARTIES CONCERNED TO RESOLVE BETWEEN THEMSELVES. ACCORDINGLY, IT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE AND COUNTER- PRODUCTIVE FOR OUTSIDE PARTIES TO INTERFERE IN WHAT IS SO OBVIOUSLY A COMPLEX, INTERNAL POLITICAL MATTER. FOR SAME REASON, WE THINK IT INAPPROPRIATE, REGARDING QUERIES ON INDIVIDUALS SUCH AS THOSE MADE BY YCWM, FOR US TO INTERVENE IN MATTERS NOW RESERVED TO SOUTH VIETNAMESE PARTIES TO DECIDE. WE WOULD AGAIN POINT OUT THAT CHARGES OF MISTREATMENT ARE HIGHLY SUSPECT.

5. BOTH PARTIES HAVE RESPONSIBILITIES ON CIVILIAN DETAINEE QUESTION, NOT JUST GVN. FOR EXAMPLE, PRG CLAIMS THAT IT HOLDS ONLY 200 CIVILIANS FOR RETURN TO THE GVN UNDER ARTICLE 8 (C). AFTER YEARS OF WAR AND THOUSANDS OF ABDUCTIONS YEARLY, PRG HAS MUCH MORE TO ACCOUNT FOR; 200 FIGURE IS PALPABLY ABSURD.

6. ARTICLE 5 OF AGREEMENT CALLS FOR END TO U. S. ADVISORY EFFORT TO SOUTH VIETNAMESE POLICE FORCE WITHIN SAME TIME AS THAT SET FOR TROOP WITHDRAWAL, 60 DAYS. IN FACT, AID ADVISORY EFFORT TO POLICE ENDED WHEN AGREEMENT WENT INTO EFFECT. PRESENT SUPPORT IS LIMITED TO COMMODITY ASSISTANCE ON A ONE- FOR- ONE REPLACEMENT BASIS AND SUPPORT FOR POLICE TRAINING OUTSIDE VIET- NAM. PREVIOUS ASSISTANCE BY AID TO THE GVN DIRECTORATE OF CORRECTIONS WAS DIRECTED AT DEVELOPING A HUMANE CORRECTION SYSTEM PROVIDING UNCLASSIFIED

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ACCEPTABLE STANDARDS OF LIVING, FOOD, SANITATION, HEALTH,

WELFARE, ETC. OBJECTIVES OF THIS PROGRAM WERE ACHIEVED
AND ASSISTANCE COMPLETED IN JANUARY 1973.

7. SUGGEST YOU GIVE GVN EMBASSY COPIES OF THE CORRESPON-
DENCE AND ENCOURAGE THEM, IF APPROPRIATE, TO TAKE MORE
ACTIVE ROLE IN HANDLING CRITICISM OF THIS ISSUE. ROGERS

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